

Sketch

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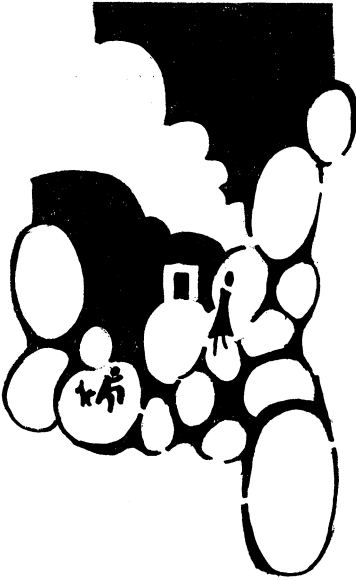
Article 3

Morning Visit

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Morning Visit

by *Kathryn Burnett*
Sociology, Jr.

THE DIRT yard in front of the *tienda* was swept early this morning; Mayla finds satisfaction in outdoing her neighbors with her broom. I stepped through the rubbish she had swept into the roadway and called to the boy squatting outside the door.

"*Hóla, Pelon.*" Pelon means bald; what the child's Christian name is I don't know for he was bald until he was two years old and has been blessed with the name ever since. "Why aren't you in school this morning?"

"*Hóla, Gringa,*" I was greeted through a mouthful of bread; my question was ignored. Smiling through dusty bangs, the child's eyes held mine for an instant. Then he screwed them tight in the effort to work another mouthful from the bun. The bread was round, hard and hollow inside. It sells for a penny a piece and is so dry that to chew a mouthful is like chewing gum. Pelon's running nose was moistening his for him; he always has a cold. Little wonder; the wet wind was sending chills through my wool sweater while he squatted barefoot in the dust, in tattered jeans and a flannel shirt with one button. "Where's Negra?" he wanted to know.

"She's coming." Negra was my flea-infested mongrel, my constant companion. She had been sidetracked by a chicken along the way. As I called, she came leaping over the rubble remaining from the last earthquake. With his fist clenching his bread, Pelon threw his arms around her neck in welcome. After the greeting, his bread was grayed with her grime. When Negra sniffed hungrily, Pelon shared the bun with her, each taking a bite in turn.

Leaving them to enjoy their breakfast, I entered the *tienda*, one of the few structures in the area that is adobe rather than bamboo. I paused on the threshold to appreciate the smell and to let my eyes adjust to the shadows. Every morning I debated as to what could create such revolting odors.

The *tienda* is like the old general store of our frontier; there are bottles, crates and shelves of many things confused together. There are cracker barrels and baskets of bread on the ground, finger-marked candy jars, bulging sacks of grain, meat hanging from the ceiling amidst swarming flies, and punctured tomatoes lining the counter edge. The vegetable counter is fashioned from a warped door laid over two barrels; here large squash are sectioned and laid open, green with mold and free to insects. Peppers, peas and beans are tossed together and United States AID boxes provide bins for potatoes, cucumbers, and onions.

The store was empty except for the girl behind the counter and her weathered mother. Mayla gave me a welcome smile. She is nineteen and blessed with a comely face as yet unmarked with scars of disease. Her hair is cut short and frizzed with a permanent.

"Your hair looks beautiful today," I ventured. Her pride at having short hair and a permanent was obvious as she giggled. "Butter, please, some eggs and candles." We had no electricity in the village, only candles.

As she unwrapped a fifteen-pound head of butter, sliced a portion with the butcher knife, and wrapped it in old newspaper, I turned toward the mother and gave her weathered cheek a kiss, as is the custom. "How are you today, mother?" I asked, taking her gnarled hands into mine and

looking into her dim eyes. She had been waiting for me to turn to her, and her eyes lost themselves in wrinkles as she flashed a toothless smile. All day she rests on the grain sacks in the warm *tienda*, anticipating her daily visitors.

"Fine, fine, *Gringa* . . . and how is your baby today?" Every day she asks the same question and long ago I ceased informing her that I was not married and had no baby.

"As fine as you please," I answered, squeezing her hand. I adjusted her shawl and arranged her black braid over her shoulder. Her braid was her grace; its smooth blackness fell below her waist and not one short hair was apparent.

"God bless you, *Gringa*," she whispered as her goodbye.

"He has," an inside whisper answered as I picked out my punctured tomato, cut two green bananas down from the ceiling for my ravenous parrot and gave my money to Mayla.

"I'll be over to visit you tomorrow to make French toast," Mayla announced. I had promised to teach her.

"Until tomorrow then." I smiled and stepped out into the wind. "'Bye, Pelon." I dropped a candy into his lap and called to Negra. We picked our way across the rubble.

Interstate 35

by *Steve Barnett*

June 27, 1944—September 15, 1967

Street lights' shimmering
reflections off wet pavement
amid insistent screams
of angry vulcanized rubber.
A collage of sounds.